

Case-study 1: "How you do" something is sometimes more important than "what you do"!

Task at hand...

At the time potato chips were a rare snack option and formed a small proportion (1%) of the overall macro-snack market.

The client wanted to develop a snack food to drive consumption and take the category higher in the context of other macro-snacks. For this, 4 high quality samples were developed to be tested to see if any of them were above to create a positive disposition. The difference in the 4 samples was minor.

Our approach...

We at Qualisys realized that the key to the success of this mammoth task lay in the methodology to be designed to unravel the insights. Testing the samples quantitatively would not yield the answer as consumers will be forced to search for differences in the product. Without telling the consumer what we were testing, we wished to get a realistic answer to whether those high quality samples were discernibly high quality or not?

8 extended focus group discussions lasting about 2-2.5 hours, with 6-7 respondents in sets of friends were conducted. Both males and females were involved in the discussions, ranging from 13-35 years of age. The trick here was to get the consumer in an informal setting so that realistic responses would follow. A floor seating arrangement was intentionally made to facilitate easy exchange of ideas in the natural settings. We initiated a very casual warm up to the conversation that ensued – even picking up anecdotes from our day to day lives. Special attention was paid to correspond the timing of the groups to the Indian snacking time. Consumers were served test samples along with other macro snacks. Another stratagem implemented here was that of disguised questioning- "So why don't do you have some more of this? What can I pass you?", etc. This helped us fathom those unaided responses by catching the respondent unawares and eliciting a true response.

The outcome...

Chips, a category which only a few decades ago was struggling to make inroads into the Indian snacking habit, today stands at the pinnacle of a phenomenal success. Nudging its way through the clutter of Indian traditions and habits, the fledgling category finally



found a way to the Indian heart. And getting the product right was the 1st biggest challenge. And with all these efforts, we managed to get a product which was superior from the consumer point of view and not just the marketer's point of view. Incidentally, none of the 4 samples passed the test.

Highlights...

The optimum mix of innovative techniques used to elicit the right range of responses from the consumers across various age groups. The settings including the floor seating arrangements, disguised questioning format, etc. were such that the consumers could easily voice their preferences, barriers towards warming up to the category, and give realistic responses to the 4 products tested.

Case Study 2: Multiple dimensions to a 'GO' – 'NO GO' through qualitative research!

Task at hand...

One of our clients was looking at expanding to newer geographies. Now the 'terrain' they were exploring, was a tough nut to crack with its atypical milieu in the context of its shopping habits. Moreover competitors had met with very limited success in that otherwise, very rich state.

So the key question that lay ahead was if our client should dare venture into such 'troubled waters'? If at all potential existed, what should be the entry strategy in terms of the product, pricing, communication, USP etc. The client did not want to lag behind in getting there if potential seemed to exist but did not even want to go there and come back frustrated.

The business stakes involving the decision were high as it had big money riding on it. So the responsibility resting on our shoulders was enormous.

Our approach...

We set forth on our odyssey to discover the answers to our multiple queries with indispensable but infrequently used tools like common sense, an open mind and keen observation packed along with our experience. We traversed right across the state laboring for several days at a stretch and assuming multiple roles to obtain an in-depth understanding of the attitudes (barriers, motivations, preferences etc.) towards the seemingly simple but complex activity of shopping in this region.

We first and foremost set ourselves on devising a research methodology circumscribing all the pertinent questions at hand. We designed various modules for the project including those of **accompanied shopping**, innumerable market visits along with several **mystery shopping** sprees. To catch a glimpse of the consumers' viewpoint a module involving **FGDs** was also very skillfully woven into our research design.

As our trend spotting analysis showed us that rapidly changing social norms like nuclear families coming into existence, sons going abroad to study, etc., a 'metamorphosis' in the retail scenario was taking place in this region as well. Some recent successes in certain parts of this state did indicate that there was hope of making it to this discerning consumer's heart.

But before jumping to conclusions, a lot of concerns had to be addressed. The questions about the kind of assortment this market needed... how much of it was to be indigenized to cater to the local taste and about developing a customized proposition to appeal to the inhabitants of this region, needed to be answered.

After assessing the potential, zeroing in on feasible and appropriate locations for the new stores for making an entry was the most formidable task of all. How far people were willing to travel and the motivations and barriers offered by the current retail landscape of the area were some of the key questions. The brief had already outlined certain possible areas. We did the 'reiki' of all the plausible locations, even doing our part as real estate agents. Using maps, with the plausible areas plotted, by putting entire cities and retail landscape under the scanner, we were able to deliver some very insightful pointers on this aspect as well.

The outcome...

The output rendered by us was very 'visual' with locations plotted on the map giving comprehensive information about demographics, competitive scenario etc. leaving little to the client's imagination. We also incorporated the video footage of the retail context. This enabled us to showcase the reality of how the various strata of the society shopped, what merchandise and communication attracted them, etc. basis which various strategic insights were built.

Our team worked round the clock, stretching beyond the brief, providing leads on various facets of the project which won us many accolades from the client.

The zeal to enrich the findings as much as possible and provide relevant, useful and thoroughly analyzed information on every aspect that could affect the success of the project was applauded. The fact that they got the answers to all their questions even without having to be physically present at the site won us another long term, deeply satisfied client!!

Highlights...

- The extensive (in terms of the no. of variables involved) and intensive (in-depth understanding of consumer purchasing psyche as well as the entire retail

landscape) nature of the project undertaken. Multiple modules, approaches and techniques combined to do justice to the brief and go beyond..

- The highly visual, easily digestible and comprehensible presentation of findings (maps with all the retail context plotted and potentially attractive locations highlighted) which transported the client to the actual place of action and transferred the experience in the most unadulterated manner.

Case study 3: Hard core analysis that finally led to a soft paneer!

Task at hand...

This case is around a product development study that we undertook for an Indian dairy products' giant. The client was set to enter a new category of dairy product namely paneer (cottage cheese) which is an integral part of the Indian cuisine and elevates the status of a typical vegetarian spread.

The unorganized market for this product, which works purely on local equity, was huge but the branded dairy players were trying to catch up. The client intended to cash in on this new trend.

The client entrusted us with a project brief entailing a list of parameters basis which the consumers were believed to judge the goodness of paneer. The task was to provide inputs to the client for testing their newly developed product and making minor changes, if need be.

Our approach...

With the given objective set in our mind, we felt that a two step approach was required. The first one involving the qualitative section where **FGDs** were done to generate attributes sought in the product (e.g. softness, creaminess etc.).

Followed by a small quali - quanti **organoleptic study** where in-house placement of 4 different samples (blind) was done – ours and competition. The housewives were asked to make the same 2 dishes with each of the 4 samples and give responses as we felt this would allow the most in-depth interaction & evaluation of the product.

The outcome...

The hypothesis that the client had suggested was that the 'Solid fat' content in any paneer was the key determinant of its goodness/price (Higher content = 'Better' product delivery = Higher price). As we went along, this proved to be an incomplete understanding of the actual determinants of product quality. Here is how:

The most critical product attributes after keen analysis at the end of the first part of our research were:

Creamy milk = Soft (not rubber like, chichda), Smooth, Spongy (as in resilient)
Fresh = No smell, Sweet (taste), White
Pure = White, Sweet taste (mithas), Not watery (does not leave water), Spongy

Basis these attributes, the next step of the **organoleptic study** through product placement was undertaken in order to fine tune the attribute dimensions and get an evaluation of our product vs. local favorites as well as other branded options.

We discovered that while the consumers stated that full cream, high fat content product would obviously be the best (as iterated by the client as well), the lowest fat content product was rated the best in performance, after usage in blind form. Of the samples placed, clearly a 'local' variety with low fat content won the race and not the high solid content samples!

This put us in a fix and set us thinking on what was it that really worked for this product. There was something which the consumer considered to be of paramount importance but was unable to express it.

On deep analysis, we realized that there was a key attribute that was being missed out in our consideration set. After much brainstorming and rigorous analysis the above anomaly was attributed to the fact that correct moisture content (expressed in different ways) seemed to be an important cue for freshness & softness – an attribute that did not even find a mention when we set out, either by the client or by the consumer directly.

Once this moisture angle in the product was understood, what followed was a winning combination!! The research gave the client a totally new perspective in terms of their product development-something which even they had not mooted. Client developed a sample that combined solid content and moisture (an attribute that emerged through research), something which consumers always wanted but were not able to verbalize it that way.

The results were amazing!! We had a sample that worked well on the three key attributes of creaminess, freshness and purity and was a clear winner against the competition.

Highlights...

- Going beyond the stipulated brief helped the client to innovate on a product that caught the market by storm!!

- Thorough analysis by revisiting the data gathered from various perspectives that helped us uncover the actual product characteristic. This was the common string behind the verbalized superficial product traits.
- Combination of techniques across quali and quanti that enabled us to capture and confirm the evaluation parameters accurately by putting the product through various litmus tests

Case study 4: Projective techniques to our rescue!

Task at hand...

The arena of ready to cook snacks was ruled by a single well known brand for quite a while. Many tried to make a dent after understanding some of the weaknesses of the brand, which seemed to be on the lines of its fuddy-duddy image and lack of newness. A new brand tried to lure the customer base by weaving a very modern outlook around the brand. In communication, the mama's boy got replaced by a cool teenager who took decisions independently. The mom was also done away with. All this because a research indicated that, the market leader was being perceived as fuddy-duddy, boring & kiddish.

The ad agency's interpretation led to the portrayal of the brand protagonist symbolising freedom & an independent lifestyle, free from the parental intervention (especially mothers') as opposed to that exemplified by the category leader.

The new positioning and storyboards were put into research and everyone waited excitedly, almost certain that this new funky image would find high appeal amongst the kids. And through the kid's pester power, the brand would enter homes and replace the category leader gradually.

Our approach...

We carried out **mini focus group discussions** with kids so that we could keep the discussion tight and in their limited attention span, use some of the **projective techniques** much needed to understand the entire gamut of issues.

The outcome...

Prima facie, the new communication and positioning seemed to appeal bringing a big smile onto the kids' faces. The enjoyment quotient of the storyboards was high but was that enough?

Usage of some key **projective techniques** like the **conceiver's technique** and the **world view technique** revealed that even though the new brand was inviting to the kids and seemed more fun & exciting, but it did not feel like home! They felt this new brand world was good to take a holiday in but not good for residing in permanently.

Our research analysis revealed that the weaknesses of the key competition brand did not have to be taken literally or become the key point of focus. Someone needed to draw the line on how far to go when offering that aspirational imagery of a young kid. Also could

one afford to bypass the gate-keeper of the house i.e. the mother, who was the centre-piece in all communication for the leading brand? And most importantly, could the brand sell only on imagery and afford to ignore the key benefits that the product was meant to offer? Could we assume all those benefits of the ready to cook category like easy to make, quick hunger gratification, mouth-watering product shots and take a leap bypassing these key product offerings?

The new brand catered to the higher order need of self actualization (Maslow's theory) without satisfying the basic physiological needs of hunger.

Even though having hit upon the chink in the armor, such a huge transition in the image failed to move down the consumers' gullets. In a bid to differentiate itself from the market leader, it lost out on the essence of the ingrained core values, so much a part of the Indian set up. The 'very contemporary' image could have been painted a few shades higher from the one being show-cased by the category leader- but given the present stark gradient, it was bound to fail. The core values of a mother nurturing a child synonymous with the Indian culture and traditions could not be ignored.

Highlights...

- Usage of some apt **projective techniques** & rigorous analysis brought to light some very pertinent aspects about this product category, the TG and the kind of communication that needed to be developed.

Case study 5: Popularity no guarantee!

Task at hand...

This case entails our association with an apparel brand with respect to selecting and using a celebrity brand ambassador effectively.

Brand ambassadors are used for various reasons – to break clutter, to create a certain brand persona matching the brand ambassador, to impart premium-ness to the brand, to build credibility and mass appeal, etc. The client in this case wanted to enliven the brand and carve out a distinct and desirable persona for it by engaging a celebrity brand ambassador.

So the task for us was to facilitate this selection process for our client. It was thus required to assess:

1. Appeal & stature of a short-list of celebrities,
2. A close examination of the key traits that define their persona and
3. Fitment of these traits with the desired persona.

Our approach...

Many a times the task of selection of a brand ambassador is viewed very simplistically and reduced to a search for the biggest star with the largest number of recent hits, his/her popularity with the TG, the client's allocated budget and that celeb's non-linkage with any other brand in the category. No wonder then that some ads with the biggest celebs also become a mockery and do not benefit either the brand or the celeb.

In our mind, we were clear that the task really is to find someone who fits best with the desired brand values, supports the brand rather than overshadowing it and adds certain values to the brand, not associated with the brand strongly. Popularity may not be the critical parameter.

The ads using celebrity brand ambassadors where both the brand and the ambassador have had a positive rub off on each other attract maximum attention; also none of them overshadow each other. Some examples of this kind of a win-win alliance that can be cited are the Vodafone - Irfan Khan alliance, the Lays-Saif Ali Khan alliance (Saif came on board for Lays prior to the big hits like Hum-Tum) to name a few. The trick in both the above cases was not using a very popular star but someone who had aspects or facets in their image that could be played up through the creative to the brand's advantage and also in the process reaffirm that image for the stars.

Another recent example of a star being used effectively not only because of his popularity but more importantly the values that he brings to the table was the Yatra.com-Salman alliance. Salman is perceived as someone who is reliable and can be trusted especially by the middle class and that is exactly the attribute that the brand also wanted to establish, given the skepticism of many with online booking. The creative also suited the star completely.

Celebrities also come with a mixed bag of perceived attributes, some favorable and others not so favorable. The task then is to pick someone who has a workable mix wherein the not so desirable attributes can be consciously suppressed by choosing the right storyline and characterization. But for that, one must be cognizant of those attributes in that celebrity and cautious enough to not let those affect the brand persona. Also certain strengths of the celebrity may sometimes not be desirable or intended for the brand persona. For e.g. a trait like serious, hardworking maybe a big positive of the celeb but the brand wants to cue cool & chilled out attitude, while at the same time many other positives of the celeb do go with the brand. The challenge then is to be aware of these possible values of the celeb and play up the relevant strengths of that celebrity .

The initial piece of research was a quantitative exercise wherein the long list was reduced to a shortlist of 2-3 celebs. The 2nd step was a qualitative one used for selecting one from amongst the three shortlisted celebrities, using a range of techniques like mood boards, sorting, interest graphs, Kelly's triads etc.

The 3rd aspect of the research was to get a deep dive into the celebrity values so as to ascertain how to use him best by capturing the most robust and vivid images that consumer had of the celebrity. For this too, multiple tools and techniques were applied. Extensive VISUAL PROFILING was done on lines of.. *What car would he drive? What will his childhood be like? Who will be his friends? What will be his holiday spot? What will be his idea of romance? Etc.*

The outcome...

The first part of the research for selecting one from amongst the three shortlisted celebrities did not throw up a clear winner but basis analysis of what did come through and with client inputs on desired brand imagery, one celeb was shortlisted. The catch here was that this celeb had just had two back to back flops and was at a low point in his career after a fairly successful launch. What he had going for him were a set of image attributes that overlapped well with the desired brand image.

Though there was significant risk involved, our job was cut out to find how best to work around the pitfalls and use this celeb most effectively. We managed to get an extremely fine understanding of the celeb persona by using various profiling techniques, a result of which was development of a visual deck over a period of time with 'emotion' words assigned to them. A selection of apt visuals from this deck was then used.

The ad agency understood the positives, negatives and grey areas in his persona and went to the drawing board to develop some story boards that brought those needed dimensions well. The look and feel of the celeb, the kind of storylines that would bring out the intended values from the celeb the best, was conceived. These were then tested to see whether the intended brand values were coming through without the celebrity's lower popularity or certain undesirable values coming in the way.

And soon enough, we had a successful ad on air with high recall, the brand going up in the TG's consideration set with an eventual rub-off on sales. That new look assigned to the celebrity also did well for him in his career!

Highlights...

- Appreciation of the multiple dimensions of selecting a celebrity brand ambassador.
- The extent of follow through, with the findings from one step feeding into the next so that the resulting impact is much larger than the sum of parts.
- Usage of a smart mix of multiple innovative qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Case study 6: Capturing the 'unsaid'

Backdrop...

Enough stress cannot be laid on the importance of capturing the non verbal aspects of an individual's response by tracking and understanding his body language, eye-movement, changes in heart rate/ pulse etc. Many a times a co-moderator who is a trained observer is involved in quali sessions purely to note these aspects of the responses that may be too valuable to risk losing out on. These non- verbalized nuggets of information become even more vital when the respondent is not articulate enough due to constraints like language fluency, age etc. or in cases where he/ she is more likely to put a false façade or be more defensive because of the nature of the subject being handled.

The case here also was one, where the target group was small children whose reactions to a few episodes of a popular TV series were to be ascertained.

Task at hand...

The client wanted us to expose a few episodes that had been developed for the new season of a popular kids' TV series and evaluate it on key parameters like appeal or interest generated, comprehension, elements liked/ disliked etc both at an absolute level as well as relative to a popular competing kids TV series.

Our approach...

From our understanding of the brief and the TG involved, we were quite certain that in this case we would need to rely a whole lot on the non verbal responses as children in the targeted age group are rarely able to verbalize their thoughts and emotions with regard to a subject. Also the other element that we would need to take care of was to simulate as closely as possible the usual environment in which the consumption of such programs takes place by children with all the other distractions etc. in place and not put them in a spot which might intimidate them.

So we decided to use the 'eyes on screen' methodology by showing the program to sets of 2 children at a time, who were observed by one trained observer post which each child was interviewed individually.

The notion supporting this methodology was that the insights that we would gather by tracking the child's immersion in the program, equivalent to his focus on the screen at various points, would be far higher than those that would be obtained by only

questioning him.

The environment created for this exercise was kept as natural and friendly as possible and interesting snacks and beverages were also made available; in order to observe whether the child is engrossed enough to even ignore his favorite snacks and if so at what points of the program such levels of interest are generated.

The order of exposure of the various programs (ours as well as competition's) was also rotated to rule out any influence of this extraneous factor.

The facial expressions of the child, his body language, his eye ball movement... all were keenly observed.

The questionnaire employed for the interviews was also kept extremely child friendly using simplistic everyday language without any overload of jargon. A child's short attention span was also considered in deciding the length and flow of the questionnaire. The focus being on checking the key observations made while the programs were being viewed in an uncomplicated but indirect manner.

The outcome...

The synthesis of the verbal and non verbal responses enabled us to provide the client with some extremely valid and actionable insights with regard to the various facets of the program content.

Our detailed analysis also enabled us to suggest areas of improvement that went beyond only the episodes in question and gave the client an unbiased, informed perspective on the desirables in a program targeted at children that age, in the Indian context, which they found highly useful.

This allowed them to fine tune the programs, incorporating most of our recommendations, which worked no less than magical for them as indicated in the recall and various ratings for this series post our research.

Highlights...

- The use of appropriate blend of methodologies best suited for the TG and subject in question.
- The effort taken to simulate real settings of program consumption and to minimize influence of any variable that could contaminate findings both at the viewing and interviewing stage.



- The accuracy in capturing and decoding the non- verbal responses with help of experts and weaving them in well to create a strong case.

Case study 7: "A good framework could frame you!"

Task at hand...

In order to align its content with the preferences of the young metro populace, a popular Indian lifestyle channel wanted to relook at its content and make it more relevant to their TG. They gave us a few current shows to find audience's perception on. The objectives were to primarily understand the sentiments towards Hindi dubbed international shows and find the need gaps in the current content of the channel's produced shows in the same genre. International shows, if liked, work out to be far cheaper but are they liked as much and how do they compare with the home productions of that channel was the dilemma. The on-going shows were also seeing a dip. So was the genre losing relevance or they were not being able to deliver well on it? Other channels in that category were however on an upward trend. And they had more of the Hindi dubbed international shows

Our approach...

We took an age-old tested research route, wherein via extended focused group discussions lasting about 2.5hrs we would capture the audience's views on the current shows. The sample was split into working and non working males and females who had a preference for that genre. They were met in segments which watched dubbed international content and were either viewers or lapsed of our channel. We also did 4 in-depth interviews with Males and females who were regular viewers of International shows in English to gauge their views about the dubbed content seekers.

While conducting the groups, we realized that the content of these shows wasn't the only parameter of preference. Their timings, show title, adverts etc swayed the preference quite a bit. We got on board all shows they like or dislike or were now losing interest in, in general, the need gaps and they went out to obtain reactions to the 10 minute preview of the new shows we were to test

7 old shows and 8 new shows was quite a mammoth task. But good analysis and structuring thoughts can make the task simple! Just one slide per show explained everything to the client, and helped them get a tool to understand and evaluate any show in their head belonging to that genre!

The outcome...

This is how we managed it all....

We culled out all the attributes they liked or disliked from the volumes of feedback for each of the test shows as well as other shows they liked in general. Once we created a 'framework' of attributes that create a successful program culled out from the general likes and dislikes, we superimposed onto that our test programs to see how many of those attributes that program was satisfying.

So a qualitative analysis lead to a table of attributes and each show's delivery on that attribute was marked in green, yellow or red (as per the traffic lights color significance) with the comments to explain what caused the same.

Not only did the rigorous analysis make the mammoth task of evaluating 15 programs easier, it gave a clear prescription of what to ensure when developing a new program or acquiring one in that genre. We developed a generic attribute list for that genre and some specific ones for each topic (like travel, food, etc) to evaluate the relevant program in-depth.

A template was formed as a result which was later referred to like a bible by the client to evaluate any future or current program and be able to diagnose what was working and what was pulling it down! The client was in awe of the depth of our findings and appreciated the quick-n-good turnaround Qualisys stands for. We did this in 5 days post the fieldwork!

What we didn't realize that in that process we gave the client a 'Brahmastra' to evaluate any program at their end and not come back to us for further program content evaluation.

Some good deeds backfire as well! And surely we got framed in our own framework!

Highlights

- The process of decoding with a scramble to blueprint approach where consumer behavior is mapping out in logical categories and sequences.
- The data from each study is carefully whetted and expediting the study doesn't necessarily mean shortening our scope of work



- The utility of the framework that it could be extrapolated to current shows and formed a basis for future judgment for the client for all times to come

Case study 8: If you don't pack your bags right, you could miss the flight!

Task at hand...

With an objective to diversify its product line, our client forayed into the 'Mix-n-Drink' category. The product was a milk based powdered beverage which came in a product composition of premix powder which had to be mixed in water to prepare an instant milk shake with no need to add any extra sugar or milk. Qualisys was approached to understand the consumer feedback on the product on sensory aspects, price point and also to capture the motivations & barriers to accept the new product....the usual stuff!

Our approach...

Rather than opting for a pure quantitative product test, we came up with a research design which had a mix of both - Group discussions lasting 1.5hrs each where in the middle of the session we would break-out to taste the product at secluded stations and make them fill a self-completion questionnaire and then meet back to capture the voice of the tasters in unison. As the product's TG was primarily very broad, we split it into kids 12-14yrs, school going youth of 15-18yrs, college going youth of 19-24 yrs of age, mothers 25-35 yrs and working men 25-35yrs. A total of 10 groups were done across the 5 segments, so we had a somewhat bigger base to provide for some numbers as well as get the quali feel going.

For the product test, the market ready sachets were given to the users along with the client provided proprietary shaker (which we had our doubts about from the start in terms of the shaker's availability & use on each occasion and the sheer effective repeat purchases it would trigger). We also didn't know how the miscibility of the powder would be if the consumer didn't shake it enough. Instead of explaining the process to the consumer, we simply helped them by placing the requisite amount of water in the shaker and asked them to follow the instructions on the pack. We basically built-in a packaging usability and label comprehension test also, right into the product development. What was to follow got us thinking.

The consumer insights which were captured right after the product test turned the whole brief upside down. The product in itself fared well on all parameters, its taste, thickness, creaminess, pricing, everything the study was set to gauge- was perfect. What lacked was something that we didn't fathom in the purview of a product test. The packaging was meant for the user to mix the given amount of pre-mix powder in 150ml of water. Now, the standard glass size in North India (where this product was tested and where

many use the typical steel, big glass when thirsty) is a little over 200ml, and the format of mix-n-drink is currently used as summer refreshment for kids and adults alike. All the segments in the GD that ensued voiced that this 150ml drink would be insufficient to quench their thirst. We also discovered that water based mix-n-drink powders are mostly added to more water than prescribed. Consumers tend to add some sugar to the drink to maintain the sweetness, while the flavor meant for half the North Indian glass is used for the whole. But here, being a milk based drink, one sachet to 200ml water resulted in the expected watery drink which didn't taste well. And the positioning of it being an instant milky shake would then come under question.

Stemming from a consumer response that if this was meant to be a milkshake, why don't we try it with milk also as that would retain the thickness and also allow more milk to be added than the 150 ml of water. So, we improvised right there and then, got a few packets of milk at the venue impromptu (as part of the plan at all). And the client didn't ask for it. We felt the need to explore and did that to be able to understand this new product completely and where all it could be extended. So the consumers tested the milk+mix milkshake and then a milk+water+mix milkshake and that precisely was our Eureka moment. Some even wanted to try it in warm milk to check its usability in winters also. We managed to test that as well too in the same sessions.

The outcome...

The client was presented the findings of the research with the overall product and format faring well with the consumers on all of the stated parameters. We brought up the fact that the powdered contents of the sachet were felt insufficient for the markets where glass sizes are large (eg North, central markets) whereas in the West, East and South there is a concept of small glass sizes. Plus the East and south being milk scarce markets, the concept of a water based milkshake would be appealing. The client was stunned with our finding that the current sachet is usable for milk+water or milk alone use as well and consumers seem to be equally happy using milk at times and water at other times (but for that the pack size had to increase and the consumer was ready to pay an extra Rs.2 for it as the product no doubt was very delicious). In order to make a water based milkshake, the same sachet could be used in the small-glass markets or the sachet size would have to be increased.

Based on our findings the format, packaging and positioning of the product were changed, and till date the demand for the product is more than its supply. The client sells it in more in smaller towns and distributes it only to modern retail stores yet.

So the pack size was increased, the price point changed, usage instructions included milk use also and even higher SECs could use as against the hypothesis that this was a middle class drink who would use water only. Also what seemed to be just a summer drink found use in warm milk too, ready to be used the year round. Milk is a reality for most people sometime of the day in India and this really made them love their milk! The flavors were unique and not available in the market.

Highlights

- What started as a typical product test, due to the choice of methodology - a combination of quali and quanti gave us an insight that while the product when tested as prescribed as WOW, in reality, it was not as per consumer usage pattern
- Insights could be anywhere, not where you seek them - so while the product swung, the insight lead to a packaging and pricing change and also the method of use (water, cold milk as well as hot milk)
- All of the above also broad-based the TG for the brand to include all SECs
- Not only did it increase the width of usage it also increased the depth of usage to become an all year round drink!
- And obviously, the positioning also had to be tweaked to make it more robust!
- We make the client's product our own...and the love shows in our work!

Case 9: Holding onto your guns and conviction does pay off!

Task at hand:

A certain kind of kids-snack in the country was booming at an unprecedented pace which led our snack client to get its foot into that space. They had recently made a foray into the snacks market.

The task was to find out the performance of our client's 3 newly developed snack products in the same category (with some differences in shape and formulation, referred to as X in here) against a very well faring product A in the market. Product A was a local brand and the largest selling in North India. The hypothesis was simple: if the product A could be a bestseller, sans huge marketing expenditure or brand equity, then the magic must surely lie in the product and if X could be better than it, the market would be theirs as they had the financial muscle to support the product with communication

Our approach:

We planned to do the research in two markets: A strong market for brand A and that category and another a small market for that category where brand A did not even exist but had plans to enter. We did about 4 mini-groups with kids and youth in each city to capture the views in breadth and depth.

The products were tested in blind form and very soon we realized that product A was not faring very great reviews. Then with the keen sense of observation and the prompt iteration that we bring in, we brought in another product B, as we believed that the product was superior and also the initial discussions with the TG also pointed to that direction. The client was not sure if that really was true and to be believed as market share figures did not support that. The client also expressed apprehension about making the kids taste too many products in a single session, but we were sure of where we were getting at. Come on, if the benchmark does not seem to be the benchmark, then what are we testing against?

After the first round of sessions in market 1, we discussed the raw findings with the client, but their apprehensions still existed as we are asking them to change their

benchmark and brief and also include product B which seemed to be doing well. They felt in market 2 where that category was small, we should not test too many products - 3 client's & product A and so we shouldn't carry any product samples of B to that market for testing. But we played it safe and carried it along just in case we realize that A was not doing well in that market too. We could have easily come back and reported a disaster as that was a call the client took but we wanted the research to be more productive. So we went along and continued the research X vs A but once the necessary findings were captured, we went ahead and tested product B as well. The results were game changing.

The outcome

Our research suggested that product X was at par or less than A in certain aspects and A was also not hailed as the best snack. It so emerged that product A was the market leader not due to its product attributes, but its sheer distribution strength (covering the smallest shop in every market and colony while the other brands were just not that easily available. Also brand A packed in more quantity per pack although not as tasty). The category winner whose organoleptic experience was superior was clearly product B - the gate-crasher!

We suggested that the benchmark for all future product development of product X be product B, as far as the organoleptic experience in concerned. We also went ahead and created a benchmark chart for each parameter telling the client which brand fares best on that attribute so that they could take the best from all worlds' and work towards a much better product and not just brand A or B.

Stemmed from our findings, the client identified their benchmark competition product for all future studies as B and appreciated our efforts of noticing the nuances and acting on them promptly. And business with them has only grown ever since.

Highlights

- Prompt actionability of interim findings, hypothesis validation happened during fieldwork, negating the need of a consecutive study
- Held on to our horses and post completing the necessary objectives did we act on our hypothesis as well, without contaminating the original brief
- A product insight that changed the course of product development

- Sometimes what seems big is not necessarily the best - we need to not take the brief at face value and stop questioning things
- And definitely gate-crashing is always more fun provided you know how to get around it! We had our reasons....

Case study 10: When the wall marketer hit a wall himself

Backdrop...

When the marketer thinks that his market has saturated and starts to look at ways to revive it without knowing the ground reality and consumer need in detail, he starts to play with all the other P's in his marketing mix and is left panting thinking no recourse is now available. As usual, marketers tend to blame it on the communication not being able to put the proposition forward well. But if the marketer himself is unable to understand the dynamics of his product well, the brand planners can be left scratching their heads on what next..

Task at hand...

A communications agency in order to pitch to a client wished to understand this new category of walls - somewhat designer in nature and the motivations and barriers to use, along with a more in-depth need to understand his consumer in all his aspects - demographics, psychographics as well as his need state to have this kind of a wall in his home. They hired us to scrape out a new unique positioning which would make the market swirl back.

Our approach...

We went into research with our typical lens of wanting to understand the category, study the home, the lady of the house, and speak to the decision-maker for that wall. We believed that depth interviews would be the right tool as we need to see the wall in question, and in the context of that home and that user. We did our homework on seeing all ads for the category, understanding the product and other options available to them. From the time we got the brief (a Saturday evening) and the time we had to deliver the findings (the following Friday evening) we had a lot on hand. We covered just two markets - Ludhiana and Ahmedabad, we did 6 depth interviews in each city - 4 with the users and 2 with users of other options.

We went armed with our cameras (as agency pitches are always money strapped, so no allowance left for video-recording) and we did not want to miss the visual support to our findings. Since the category was small, we even sent photos of the walls of the respondents' homes we were to meet to confirm if we were meeting the right consumers. Once we got a nod from the client, we got onto a cab to go to the different houses.

The outcome...

Our keen eye and our sharp ear were able to sense something amiss. The designer wall the client had approved to be his, was actually not his, but the artwork of a local painter (and the cost difference was huge). When we saw the same pattern from home to home (while the client had many design options), we got thinking. The detective in us got activated and we wanted to know how it was done, how long it took, the cost of doing it. And there we nailed it. None of what they told us matched what the client had told us. So we even spoke to the painter and figured out what paint, what method and the devil was out right there.

The need for such walls existed but the local painter was trying to address it at his end as he did not have the know-how not did he get any commission to promote it or learn all the designs that the client had. In fact, due to lack of designs, some were losing interest.

Added to it was the problem of nomenclature of the category - a tough word to pronounce while the TG was SEC B and C. Also the ads never used the terms or showcased the fact that the method and the painter for this wall are totally different. The local painter took advantage of this ignorance of the consumer.

So the need existed, the hypothesis that the market was saturated was wrong. The problem lay elsewhere. And the client realized that training of the painter and getting him on our side was equally important as having a great product at hand.

And with such a powerful story to report to the client, the agency got the account they were pitching for!

Highlights...

- Going beyond the brief to understand the product which even the client mistook as his own
- Finding effective low cost methods to assist when cost comes in the way of approaching the objective
- Going into the market with an open-mind
- Being able to show the consumer need which clearly existed but the client was oblivious of it as it was being met by the unorganized market in an unsatisfactory manner

Case studies in the online space (#1)

Task at hand

Our client, an innovative travel portal wanted to map the consumer search flow and evaluate their UX and UI against a global leader. The task involved finding need gaps and tweaks around the search process and details to further fine tune their offerings and make it more appealing.

Our Approach

We approached the problem statement with a typical usability setup with 14 In-Depth sessions with leisure travelers. 10 of these were chosen to be users of the competition global brand and 4 of our client's portal. Each session started with a qualitative understanding of the consumer's travel needs and all the information they seek in planning their trip. Backed with an understanding of their search and planning process, we started the usability session by making the respondent conduct their search on their familiar portal first for a destination which they haven't yet searched for (in order to remove any biases and replicate real-time behavior). The user was probed on areas we discovered in their qualitative session.

Then the user was made to conduct the same search on the competing portal and a step by step observation sheet was maintained- along with a real-time screen capture. The user was made to critically evaluate the two websites on visual appeal, intuitiveness, recommendations, range of information, and robustness of information and so on. Once the freewheeling search was accounted for, we progressed to specific task based observations. The user was also made to fill a brief SCQ on the recall and efficacy of key features.

Outcome

At first, outcome was fairly consistent wherein our client's website turned out to be better than competition. The contrasts occurred once we went back to analyze the comprehension of the phraseology that our client had put to use. In an attempt to quirk up and sound humorous, our client's website lost out on many primitive consumers- ones not so adept with the online space. Flaws in the recommendation engine were found; which if worked well were of no delight to the consumer, but faulty recommendations and uninformed routing of consumer pissed them off real bad.

Executorial elements such as the wrong choice of typography leading to misinterpretation of key propositions were discovered.

Peculiar behavior of certain consumers who used various tools (offline and online) to plan ahead were taken on board and product innovations were designed around them.

Ex: a set of users used an excel sheet to paste flight listings from various travel portals and compared the flight timings and rates on the sheet, then planning their itinerary on separate worksheets. This led us to fathom the need for a planning tool, which was as basic as a task and time based checklist notepad. Which later went on to become a major



proposition for the client.

Being a meta data search was predominantly the USP of the client's website, but was not being made use of, consumers were still comparing across 6 portals simultaneously. This led us to understand that the communication to the proposition was missing on the visible real estate above the fold. Many such useful and innovative tools were not talked of at the right places.

With the advent of flight booking portals in the country and the shift in dynamics of flight booking, the above USP was slowly losing its relevance, as most portals now offered standard pricing and no differentiation was observed. We noticed that the difference occurred not in the fare but the convenience fee and discounts across portals. Our client later inculcated these differences in their listings and hence made their offering more relevant to the consumers

Highlights

Understanding the consumer need state and background helps link the usability findings to the persona. At Qualisys, we specialize in inculcating the consumer insights (based on our founder's more than two decades of experience) into our findings from the usability pattern, thus resulting in a wholesome UX research study.

Case studies in the online space (#2)

Task at hand

Our client in the e-automotive space wanted to conduct a usage and attitude study to understand the search behavior of their TG, which included serious intending buyers and enthusiasts (surfers). The primal task was to attain user navigation flows and derive a thematic user experience for the portal. Other objectives included identification of motivations and triggers to search online, their existing pain points with such portals, utility and efficacy of various tools and features, need gaps- information related/tools/benefits, and also exploration of possible extensions for the portal.

Our Approach

It was clear from the start that such an exploration could be well understood via qualitative research only. As the internet is an individual's journey and interaction, and the needs, research pattern, purchase decisions, motivations, convenience are highly qualitative issues; we decided to do away with groups and chose to do In Depth interviews. The groups were done with users of client's portal and of competition, making sure that the respondents we met were ones who intended to buy an automobile soon. This fact ensured their involvement and candidness in sharing the search process. We did 5 Depth interviews with users of client's website and competition and split them car segment wise to cover the spectrum of consumers. Each DI lasted 1.5hours and had a 30-40 minute component of usability testing. Consumers who used mobile apps for the search process were made to test the client's app against competition.

We went ahead with mapping out the offline car search experience. Consumer's need initiation, starting point of search, influencers, modes used, sources of awareness and so on..These helped us arrive at key touchpoints that a consumer goes through while buying a car. Category level (e-automobile) understanding led us to the pain points in general- some of which happened to be highly differentiating elements.

The Usability testing legs involved the user to perform the search for a person closely related to them (not themselves, as that would bypass the surf and the end result would already be known). *For Ex: If you had to search for a car for your wife today, how would you go about it? We chose to do this on client's and competition website.*

Then specific tasks were performed which were based on common user behaviors, to see how the user prefers to perform them. Then specific features were probed upon to seek the relevance and imagery of people for those features.

All qualitative understandings were used as probes in the usability leg and culmination of the two led to extremely useful insights

The Outcome..

The amalgamation led us to understand the different segments in our audience based on their experience. Segments were explored basis the consumer's category experience (cars) and their internet search expertise. An amazing concoction of the two clearly

defined a chunk of the universe of automobile searchers. Their need state, approach, set of influencers and buying cycle- everything could be mapped based on these segments. The usability screencasts were carefully observed and our segment's behavior concretized their formation. User navigation was formulated via flow charting the milestones.

Plausible executions to cue credibility, utility and impact of the reviews were found. Taking forward a consumer understanding that TV plays an important role in painting experts as category celebrities, we came up with the idea of expert reviews for each car. Segment-linked user navigation flows helped us reach a new User experience which mapped the common denominator without alienating any of the segments. The client's erstwhile UI-thought of avoiding drop downs was altered to move with the changing time. Self and cross industry references were made in order to showcase the drift in the ease the consumer has today with a website and how he looks at (and expects from) an information portal today.

A SWOT analysis against competition helped ascertain certain propositions that were open to utilizing and gave the brand a way forward.

Highlights...

Adapting the discussion flow according to user behavior. Ratifying dynamic hypotheses formation. Identifying key bottlenecks in user flow on the website-linking it to the offline behavior. Creating a robust framework for classification of users and their needs from the portal.